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ABSTRACT

A study of the skill priorities of Connecticut's adult education stakeholders asked 838 business and industry providers, 4,846 learners, 774 instructional service providers, and 753 state agencies and public service providers to rate how critical 55 competencies are to an adult's ability to function in society and the workplace. The competency statements covered these areas: basic communication, consumer economics, community resources, health, employment, government and law, computation, and learning to learn. Stakeholders rated each competency statement as very important, important, somewhat important, or not important, with numeric ratings from 4 to 1, respectively. Average scores for each competency statement by each respondent group, scores for each competency area by each respondent group, weighted aggregate responses, and competency area mean ratings were computed from responses on the 4,245 useable questionnaires returned. As an aggregate, stakeholders rated basic communication highest, then employment, learning to learn, and health and gave computation, consumer economics, community resources, and government and law its lowest ratings. Business and industry providers' competency area rankings were almost identical to the aggregate's. Learners ranked health highest, then basic communication and employment. Instructional service providers' rankings were most similar to those of learners and least similar to those of business and industry providers. State agencies and public service providers' rankings were most similar to those of the aggregate and business and industry providers. Recommendations were made to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment and to focus program planning, staff development, and program coordination. Contains 13 tables. (YLB)

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ED 434 240

TARGETING EDUCATION:

The Connecticut Adult Basic Skills Survey

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Connecticut Department of Education
Bureau of Adult Education and Training

By the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System

September 1997

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Targeting Education: The Connecticut Adult Basic Skills Survey was prepared for the Connecticut Bureau of Adult Education and Training by the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System (CASAS). The Bureau of Adult Education and Training was intimately involved in the development of the report. Roberta Pawloski, Bureau Chief, and J. Ronald Harrison and Richard G. Wharton, Education Consultants, set the direction of the project and oversaw all policy decisions. They also provided detailed input on project plans and report drafts, and oversaw the distribution of the project's survey instrument.

Terri Bergman, CASAS Associate Researcher, was the principle investigator and the CASAS team leader for the project. Ms. Bergman coordinated the research analysis effort and authored the report. Linda Taylor served as project advisor. She helped design the survey instrument, the survey distribution plan, and the research analysis. Patricia Rickard, CASAS Executive Director, provided advice and guidance throughout the research and development of the project.

Randy Ilas spear-headed the data analysis effort, overseeing the data input, producing the data tables, and conducting all tests of statistical significance. Andrew Evans helped construct the project data base and formatted some of the figures for the publication. Robert Walsh analyzed all of the "other" responses, and Maya Drake formatted most of the tables and figures for the report. The publication's final graphic design was created by Sally Saltzman, of Saltzman Graphic Design.

We wish to recognize and thank the agencies, organizations, institutions, businesses, and individuals who took the time to participate in the study by completing the survey. Targeting Education: The Connecticut Adult Basic Skills Survey is truly the result of a team effort. The project could not have been completed without the contribution of everyone.

FOREWORD

Adult basic education programs are facing significant challenges in meeting the diverse needs of today's and tomorrow's workforce. They must respond to increasing pressures to serve more learners, and to educate them at much higher levels with limited resources. They are also asked to meet an increasing demand to provide solid accountability based on clear learning outcomes for all learners who participate in educational programs.

In order to respond effectively to these challenges, all stakeholders must agree on the competencies that adults need to know to be able to function effectively as family members, in the workforce, and in the community. Clear standards of educational attainment need to be identified for these competencies, and valid and reliable assessments must be put in place to document progress toward and attainment of the competencies.

This study provides a solid basis for identifying priority competencies for all learners in Connecticut's adult basic education programs. It is significant and unique because it reflects the perspectives of business and industry providers, learners, instructional service providers, and state agency and public service providers. It also addresses the need to collaborate with other agencies and institutions serving adults and to address societal needs, including parenting, civic responsibilities, and employment participation. The competencies identified in this study provide the necessary baseline data to develop relevant curriculum and instruction to meet these new and emerging needs.

To identify the changing basic skill needs of the adults in Connecticut, the Connecticut Bureau of Adult Education and Training commissioned this study. The study results will be used to determine how the state may best provide the quality adult basic education programs needed to move forward into the twenty-first century.

Patricia Rickard
Executive Director
Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System

PREFACE

Targeting Education: The Connecticut Adult Basic Skills Survey builds on earlier efforts by the Bureau of Adult Education and Training to define skill competency priorities. In 1986, the Connecticut Department of Education implemented its statewide competency-based initiative, currently referred to as the Connecticut Competency System. Thereafter, instructional staff realized that because time constraints limited instructional exposure to students, it was necessary to set priorities for competencies to ensure that clients mastered those skills identified as most critical to functioning well in community, family, and work environments. In 1991, this process was formalized in the Priority Competency List for Adult Basic Education, which incorporated as an enhancement a detailed listing of essential basic skills that should be integrated into the life skills curriculum.

This most recent attempt goes far beyond the earlier efforts. Within the last few years adult education has aligned itself more closely with other agencies whose clients it serves in its programs. The Connecticut Competency System plays a vital role in welfare reform, one-stop centers, regional workforce development board collaboration, workplace literacy programs, family and intergenerational literacy programs, and school-to-career activities. All these initiatives, in turn, have had an impact on not only what is taught in the adult education classroom but also the context of what is taught.

Previous efforts to establish priorities have been relatively informal and limited to the perspectives of adult educators. Targeting Education provides a comprehensive portrait of what adult education stakeholders -- adult students, adult education instructors, employers, and state agencies and other organizations -- feel are essential skills needed to function well in todayÆs social and economic world. Targeting Education is intended to inform the instructional process and to assist in developing responsive curricula based on documented client needs, so that adult education programs maximize teaching and learning effectiveness.

Roberta Pawloski, Chief
Bureau of Adult Education and Training
Connecticut Department of Education

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Targeting Education: The Connecticut Adult Basic Skills Survey is designed to increase the effectiveness of adult education in the state by making instruction more responsive to Department of Education constituents. Targeting Education provides information on the skills learners are trying to acquire, the skills employers are seeking in those they might hire, the skills educators are trying to teach, and the skills program operators have set as the focus of their efforts.

Adult education is critical in today's society. Adults with more education and higher skills earn more money than those with less education and lower skills. Adult education has intergenerational consequences as well. Parents with low skills usually do not give their children the educational support they need to succeed in school. Thus, low skills and low incomes are passed from one generation to the next.

Connecticut is a high skill, high wage state. Major growth industries include service business, retail trade, and insurance, all of which are increasingly dependent on electronic technology -- and individuals skilled enough to operate this technology. While high skills are necessary for success in Connecticut's labor market, 20 percent of Connecticut's total adult population (18 years and older) have not completed high school.

This skills gap makes adult education in Connecticut an economic imperative; investments in adult education are critical to the social and economic fabric of the state. To make wise investments, though, Connecticut must ensure that its adult education programs meet the needs of the state's citizens and businesses. Understanding the skill priorities of Connecticut's adult education stakeholders is a key ingredient for targeting education investments most effectively.

SURVEY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Targeting Education is based on a survey of Connecticut stakeholders who rated how critical various skills, or competencies, are to an adult's ability to succeed in society and the workplace. These ratings were then combined to determine average rating scores, rankings, and priority levels for the various skills.

Survey Instrumentation

The survey instrument included 55 competency statements (relatively specific skills), which were divided into eight competency areas (categories of the competency statements):

- Basic communication;
- Consumer economics;
- Community resources;
- Health;

- Employment;
- Government and law;
- Computation; and
- Learning to learn.

Stakeholders were asked to rate how important each of the 55 competency statements was to adult learners' ability to function in today's society and workforce, and were provided four choices:

- Very important;
- Important;
- Somewhat important; and
- Not important.

A second section of the survey allowed stakeholders to rank their top four of the eight competency areas. The results of this section were used to determine the reliability of the section one survey results.

Survey Methodology

The Connecticut Bureau of Adult Education and Training focused its survey on four stakeholder groups:

- Business and industry providers;
- Learners;
- Instructional service providers; and
- State agencies and public service providers.

The Bureau distributed 7,211 surveys: 838 to business and industry providers, 4,846 to learners, 774 to instructional service providers, and 753 to state agencies and public service providers. In total, 4,459 surveys were returned, yielding an unadjusted response rate of 61.8 percent. Two hundred fourteen of the surveys could not be included in the analysis, which left 4,245 and an adjusted response rate of 58.9 percent.

Survey Analysis

To analyze and report survey responses, the four descriptive ratings respondents could have assigned to the 55 competency statements were given a numeric value from 1 to 4 (see Table 1).

Table 1 - Competency Rating Scale

Competency Rating	Numeric Value
Very Important	4
Important	3
Somewhat Important	2
Not Important	1

CASAS, 1997

These numeric values were used to create average scores for each of the 55 competency statements by each respondent group. These average competency statement scores were then averaged again within each competency area to create scores for each of the competency areas by each respondent group. In order to give equal importance to the ratings of each of the respondent groups (rather than each of the respondents individually), "weighted aggregate" responses were computed by averaging the scores of the four respondent groups for each particular competency statement or competency area.

Competency area mean ratings were then used to rank the areas for each respondent group and the aggregate. Rankings were set, first through eighth, from highest mean rating to lowest mean rating. These rankings, along with the average scores calculated for each competency statement and competency area, are the primary means of reporting the perceived importance of competency statements and competency areas in this study.

The use of mean ratings and rankings in this report is supplemented by a system of priority levels, which is also based on the ratings individuals gave to the 55 competency statements in the survey. However, instead of being based on a numerical average of the response ratings, priority levels are based on the distribution of ratings over the four choices: "very important," "important," "somewhat important," and "not important."

To determine the priority levels, the project team calculated the percentage of respondents who rated a particular competency statement as "very important" or "important." Four priority levels were created in this manner (see Table 2).

Table 2 - Priority Levels

Priority Level	Percentage of Respondents Rating a Competency Statement as "Very Important" or "Important"
Top	85% or more
High	70% to 84%
Mid	50% to 69%
Low	Fewer than 50%

CASAS, 1997

AGGREGATE RESULTS

Connecticut's adult education stakeholders, as an aggregate, rate basic communication higher than any other competency area. This is followed by the employment, learning to learn, and health competency areas. The aggregate gave the computation, consumer economics, community resources, and government and law competency areas its lowest ratings.

There are many similarities in the rankings of the eight competency areas established by the aggregate and those established by each of the four stakeholder groups (see Table 3).

- The aggregate and three of the four stakeholder groups all rank the basic communication competency area first. Learners rank this competency area second.
- The aggregate and three of the four stakeholder groups rank the government and law competency area last. Learners rank this area seventh.
- Three of the four stakeholder groups include the aggregate's four top ranking competency areas in their top four (though only state agencies and public service providers rank the four areas in the same order).
- Business and industry providers include the aggregate's top three ranking competency areas in its top four (the aggregate's fourth ranking competency area is business and industry providers' fifth ranking area).

The largest differences among the stakeholder groups' rankings are in the health and computation competency areas. Learners and instructors place much more value on the health competency area than do the other stakeholders. Business and industry and state agency and public service providers, however, place much more value on the computation competency area than do the other stakeholders.

Table 3 - Competency Area Rankings by Respondent Groups

Competency Area	Aggregate	Business and Industry Providers	Learners	Instructional Service Providers	State Agencies and Public Service Providers
Basic Communication	1	1	2	1	1
Employment	2	2	3	4	2
Learning to Learn	3	3	4	3	3
Health	4	5	1	2	4
Computation	5	4	8	7	5
Consumer Economics	6	6	5	5	7
Community Resources	7	7	6	6	6
Government and Law	8	8	7	8	8

CASAS, 1997

The aggregate considers thirteen of the 55 competency statements to be top priorities, including six employment, three learning to learn, two basic communication, one health, and one computation competency statement (see Table 4). The majority of the basic communication, employment, and learning to learn competency statements are aggregate top priorities.

The aggregate's top competency statement is a communication skill, while the second is focused on acquiring a job. Six of the aggregate's top thirteen competency statements are employment related. Other of the top thirteen competency statements relate to thinking/problem solving, computation, health and safety, and personal management.

The aggregate does not consider any of the consumer economics, community resources, or government and law competency statements to be top priorities.

Connecticut stakeholders' competency ratings can also be analyzed in relation to the SCANS skills, those skills identified by a U.S. Department of Labor task force commissioned to identify the skill areas and competencies that need to be targeted if this country is to compete in a global economy. In 1992, the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) released its final report recommending 20 workplace competencies and 16 foundation skills.

Table 4 - Top Priority Skills: Aggregate Respondents

	Rating	Competency Statement	BC	E	LL	H	C	CE	CR	GL
1.	3.67	Communicate in general interpersonal interactions	•							
2.	3.61	Understand basic principles of getting a job		•						
3.	3.58	Communicate effectively in the workplace (i.e., written and oral communication skills)		•						
4.	3.50	Demonstrate ability to use problem solving skills			•					
5.	3.50	Demonstrate ability to use thinking skills			•					
6.	3.46	Demonstrate effectiveness in working with other people		•						
7.	3.45	Compute using whole numbers					•			
8.	3.43	Understand concepts and materials related to job performance and training		•						
9.	3.42	Use language of clarification	•							
10.	3.36	Understand wages, benefits, and concepts of employee organizations		•						
11.	3.35	Identify or practice organizational and time management skills			•					
12.	3.34	Understand safety standards and procedures in training programs and workplace		•						
13.	3.32	Understand health and safety procedures				•				

CASAS, 1997

The SCANS competencies relate to five of the nine CASAS employment competency statements, and four of the five CASAS learning to learn competency statements. The aggregate rated all nine of these competency statements as either top priorities (five) or high priorities (four).

Table 5 shows how Connecticut's adult education stakeholders rated the SCANS-related CASAS competency statements, and provides an understanding of how Connecticut's priorities relate to national level workplace priorities. The aggregate rating on all but one of CASAS' SCANS-related competency statements ("understand social, organizational, and technological systems") is above a 3, the score for an "important" competency statement.

Table 5 - Mean Ratings of SCANS-Related CASAS Competency Statements by Respondent Group

Survey Competency Statement	Aggregate	Business and Industry Providers	Learners	Instructional Service Providers	State Agencies and Public Service Providers
Effectively utilize common workplace technology	3.25	3.36	3.17	3.11	3.37
Communicate effectively in the workplace	3.58	3.67	3.34	3.64	3.68
Effectively manage workplace resources	3.10	3.19	3.03	2.99	3.19
Demonstrate effectiveness in working with other people	3.46	3.60	3.18	3.49	3.58
Understand social, organizational, and technological systems	2.99	3.00	3.00	2.91	3.04
Identify or practice organizational and time management skills	3.35	3.41	3.23	3.32	3.42
Demonstrate ability to use thinking skills	3.50	3.57	3.28	3.53	3.61
Demonstrate ability to use problem solving skills	3.50	3.62	3.24	3.55	3.59
Demonstrate study skills	3.09	2.86	3.14	3.26	3.10

CASAS, 1997

There are, however, some differences among the respondent groups in how they rated the nine competency statements.

- In eight of nine cases, learners gave these competency statements their lowest ratings.
- Seven out of nine of the highest ratings for the SCANS-related competency statements came from state agencies and public service providers.

These differences suggest that learners may not fully understand the skills they will need to succeed in the workplace, while state agencies and public service providers are well-versed on these skills.

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY PROVIDER RESULTS

Business and industry providers' mean ratings on the survey's eight competency areas range from a low of 2.48 for government and law, to a high of 3.44 for basic communication. The business and industry provider group's ratings of 2.48 for government and law and 2.52 for community resources are the lowest mean competency area ratings provided by any of the respondent groups.

A rank ordering of the business and industry provider group's competency area ratings is almost identical to that of the aggregate; only the fourth and fifth rankings, computation and health, are reversed (see Table 3).

Business and industry providers rated 14 of the 55 competency statements as top priorities, including six employment, three learning to learn, two basic communication, two computation, and one health competency statement (see Table 6). Twelve of the business and industry providers' 14 top priority skills are the same as those selected by the aggregate.

Table 6 - Top Priority Skills: Business and Industry Provider Respondents

	Rating	Competency Statement	BC	E	LL	H	C	CE	CR	GL
1.	3.74	Communicate in general interpersonal interactions	•							
2.	3.67	Communicate effectively in the workplace (i.e., written and oral communication skills)		•						
3.	3.62	Demonstrate ability to use problem solving skills			•					
4.	3.60	Demonstrate effectiveness in working with other people		•						
5.	3.57	Compute using whole numbers					•			
6.	3.57	Demonstrate ability to use thinking skills			•					
7.	3.53	Understand concepts and materials related to job performance and training		•						
8.	3.50	Understand safety standards and procedures in training programs and workplace		•						
9.	3.41	Identify or practice organizational and time management skills			•					
10.	3.38	Understand basic principles of getting a job		•						
11.	3.37	Use language of clarification	•							
12.	3.36	Effectively utilize common workplace technology		•						
13.	3.35	Compute using decimal fractions					•			
14.	3.26	Understand health and safety procedures				•				

CASAS, 1997

Business and industry providers rated the majority of basic communication, employment, and learning to learn competency statements as top priorities, which the aggregate did as well. No consumer economics, community resources, or government and law competency statements are considered top priorities by business and industry providers.

LEARNER RESULTS

Learners' mean ratings of the survey's eight competency areas range from a low of 2.92 for computation, to a high of 3.40 for health.

When learners' mean competency area ratings are placed in rank order, a different pattern appears from that for business and industry providers, suggesting some divergence in the priorities of Connecticut's two customer groups (see Table 3). This difference is greatest at the learner rating extremes: health, ranked first by learners, was ranked fifth by business and industry providers, and computation, ranked eighth and last by learners was ranked fourth by business and industry providers.

In general, learners' competency ratings are higher than those of the other groups. This is reflected in the fact that learners rated 45 competency statements as top or high priorities (more than any other group), and no competency statements as low priorities.

Learners rated only twelve competency statements as top priorities, including five employment, four health, two basic communication, and one learning to learn competency statement (see Table 7). Learners include no computation, consumer economics, community resources, or government and law competency statements in this top priority class. This contrasts with both the aggregate and the business and industry providers, who include at least one computation competency statement in their top priority levels.

Learners consider the majority of basic communication, employment, and health competency statements to be top priorities. This emphasis on health competency statements is in line with the top ranking learners gave to the health competency area.

Table 7 - Top Priority Skills: Learner Respondents

	Rating	Competency Statement	BC	E	LL	H	C	CE	CR	GL
1.	3.60	Understand basic principles of getting a job		•						
2.	3.51	Understand common ailments and seek appropriate medical assistance				•				
3.	3.50	Communicate in general interpersonal interactions	•							
4.	3.49	Understand how to select medications				•				
5.	3.45	Understand wages, benefits, and concepts of employee organizations		•						
6.	3.39	Understand health and safety procedures				•				
7.	3.38	Use language of clarification	•							
8.	3.36	Understand medical and dental forms and related information				•				
9.	3.34	Communicate effectively in the workplace (i.e., written and oral communication skills)		•						
10.	3.33	Understand safety standards and procedures in training programs and workplace		•						
11.	3.32	Understand concepts and materials related to job performance and training		•						
12.	3.28	Demonstrate ability to use thinking skills			•					

CASAS, 1997

To gain a better understanding of Connecticut's learner population, learner respondents were divided into three subgroups: ESL (English as a Second Language) students, ABE (Adult Basic Education) students, and secondary completion students. Mean competency area ratings were computed for each subgroup, and then translated into rankings. Finally, these rankings were compared to the rankings of the

total learner respondent group. In Table 8, the competency areas are displayed from first to last as ranked by all learner respondents, with the corresponding competency area rankings of each of the learner subgroups in the final three columns.

The rankings of all of the learner subgroups are quite different from those of the learners as a whole, with the secondary completion students' being most dissimilar. The rankings of the ABE and secondary completion students, however, are quite similar to each other: only their third and fourth rankings (basic communication and consumer economics) are reversed.

While learners as a whole ranked health first, ESL students did not share this priority: they ranked basic communication, the primary goal of ESL programs, first. And while learners as a whole ranked computation last, only the ESL students also ranked it last: both ABE and secondary completion students placed it two ranks higher, at number six. ABE and secondary completion students' eighth ranked competency area is community resources, which is number six for learners as a whole.

Table 8 - Competency Area Rankings by Learner Subgroups

Competency Area	Learners	ESL Students	ABE Students	Secondary Completion Students
Health	1	2	1	1
Basic Communication	2	1	3	4
Employment	3	3	2	2
Learning to Learn	4	6	4	3
Consumer Economics	5	4	5	5
Community Resources	6	5	8	8
Government and Law	7	7	7	7
Computation	8	8	6	6

CASAS, 1997

INSTRUCTIONAL SERVICE PROVIDER RESULTS

Average competency area ratings from instructional service providers range from a low of 2.86 for government and law, to a high of 3.56 for basic communication. This 3.56 rating for basic communication is the highest average competency area rating from any of the respondent groups.

Instructional service providers ranked basic communication first and government and law last, as did the aggregate, business and industry providers, and state agencies and public service providers. However, instructional service providers ranked computation seventh, much lower than business and industry providers' fourth and state agencies and public service providers' fifth place rankings.

Instructional service providers' rankings are most similar to those of the learners, but least similar to those of business and industry providers (see Table 3). This suggests that Connecticut's instructional service providers are relatively in tune with their learner customers, but less in tune with their business and industry customers.

Instructional service providers identified 24 competency statements as top priority skills (see Table 9) -- more than were identified by any other group. These top priorities include six employment, four health, three basic communication, three learning to learn, three consumer economics, three community resources, and two computation competency statements.

Instructional service providers' top priorities include competency statements from all but one of the competency areas (government and law), the widest range of top priorities selected by any of the respondent groups. Instructional service providers' top priorities include all the basic communication skills, as well as the majority of employment, learning to learn, and health competency statements.

Instructional service providers' top priorities are very similar to those of the other groups. They include all those selected as top priorities by the aggregate, all but one of those selected by the business and industry providers, and all but one of those selected by the learners.

Table 9 - Top Priority Skills: Instructional Service Provider Respondents

	Rating	Competency Statement	BC	E	LL	H	C	CE	CR	GL
1.	3.78	Understand basic principles of getting a job		•						
2.	3.75	Communicate in general interpersonal interactions	•							
3.	3.64	Communicate effectively in the workplace (i.e., written and oral communication skills)		•						
4.	3.59	Compute using whole numbers					•			
5.	3.55	Demonstrate ability to use problem solving skills			•					
6.	3.53	Demonstrate ability to use thinking skills			•					
7.	3.49	Demonstrate effectiveness in working with other people		•						
8.	3.48	Use language of clarification	•							
9.	3.47	Understand common ailments and seek appropriate medical assistance				•				
10.	3.47	Understand health and safety procedures				•				
11.	3.45	Communicate regarding personal information	•							
12.	3.42	Understand how to select medications				•				
13.	3.40	Understand wages, benefits, and concepts of employee organizations		•						
14.	3.39	Understand concepts and materials related to job performance and training		•						
15.	3.37	Compute using decimal fractions					•			
16.	3.36	Use the telephone and telephone book							•	
17.	3.36	Understand basic principles of health maintenance				•				
18.	3.35	Use weights, measures, measurement scales, and money						•		
19.	3.34	Understand safety standards and procedures in training programs and workplace		•						
20.	3.33	Apply principles of budgeting in the management of money						•		
21.	3.32	Identify or practice organizational and time management skills			•					
22.	3.30	Use community agencies and services							•	
23.	3.28	Understand methods to obtain housing and services and related maintenance						•		
24.	3.27	Understand how to locate and use different types of transportation and information							•	

CASAS, 1997

To gain a better understanding of Connecticut's instructor population, instructional service provider respondents were divided into four subgroups: secondary completion, CETO (Coordinated Education and Training Opportunities) , ESL, and ABE. Mean competency area ratings were computed for each subgroup, and then translated into rankings. Finally, these rankings were compared to the rankings of the

total instructional service provider respondent group. In Table 10, the competency areas are displayed from first to last as ranked by all instructional service provider respondents, with the corresponding competency area rankings of each of the instructional service provider subgroups in the final four columns.

The rankings of all of the instructor subgroups are significantly correlated with those of the instructional service providers as a whole. The CETO instructors' rankings are the most similar to those of instructors as a whole, while the ESL instructors' are the most dissimilar. Among the subgroups themselves, the rankings of the secondary completion and ABE instructors are quite similar to each other.

Table 10 - Competency Area Rankings by Instructional Service Provider Subgroups

Competency Area	Instructional Service Providers	Secondary Completion Instructors	CETO Instructors	ESL Instructors	ABE Instructors
Basic Communication	**1**	1	1	1	1
Health	**2**	4	3	2	3
Learning to Learn	**3**	2	4	5	2
Employment	**4**	3	2	4	4
Consumer Economics	**5**	6	5	6	6
Community Resources	**6**	7	6	3	7
Computation	**7**	5	7	8	5
Government and Law	**8**	8	8	7	8

CASAS, 1997

The rankings of each instructor subgroup separately are less similar to those of its corresponding learner subgroup than are the rankings of the instructional service providers as a whole to those of the learners as a whole. However, in three of four cases (all except ESL), the rankings of the instructor subgroups separately are more similar to those of the business and industry providers than are the rankings of the instructional service providers as a whole to those of the business and industry providers. This suggests that the secondary completion, CETO, and ABE instructors may be finding a happy medium between the interests of their learner and business and industry provider customers.

STATE AGENCY AND PUBLIC SERVICE PROVIDER RESULTS

State agencies and public service providers' mean competency area ratings range from a low of 2.61 for government and law, to a high of 3.44 for basic communication. State agencies and public service providers' rankings are most similar to those of the aggregate and of business and industry providers (see Table 3).

State agencies and public service providers placed 12 competency statements in the top priority skill level: six employment, three learning to learn, two basic communication, and one computation competency (see Table 11). These twelve competency statements include the majority of basic communication, employment, and learning to learn statements. Agencies and public providers are the only group not to include at least one health competency statement in their top priority skill level.

State agencies and public service providers' top priorities are most closely aligned with those of the aggregate and of business and industry providers: agencies and public providers' top priorities cover 85 percent and 79 percent of the aggregate's and business and industry providers' top priorities respectively.

State agencies and public service providers' list of top priority skills only include 58 percent of the learners' and 46 percent of the instructional service providers' top priorities. All top priority state agency and public service provider competency statements were selected as top priorities by at least one other respondent group.

Table 11 - Top Priority Skills: State Agency and Public Service Provider Respondents

	Rating	Competency Statement	BC	E	LL	H	C	CE	CR	GL
1.	3.68	Communicate in general interpersonal interactions	•							
2.	3.68	Understand basic principles of getting a job		•						
3.	3.68	Communicate effectively in the workplace (i.e., written and oral communication skills)		•						
4.	3.61	Demonstrate ability to use thinking skills			•					
5.	3.59	Demonstrate ability to use problem solving skills			•					
6.	3.58	Demonstrate effectiveness in working with other people		•						
7.	3.45	Compute using whole numbers					•			
8.	3.45	Use language of clarification	•							
9.	3.42	Identify or practice organizational and time management skills			•					
10.	3.39	Understand concepts and materials related to job performance and training		•						
11.	3.37	Effectively utilize common workplace technology		•						
12.	3.32	Understand wages, benefits, and concepts of employee organizations		•						

CASAS, 1997

To gain a better understanding of Connecticut's state agencies and public providers, these respondents were divided into three subgroups: education system, employment system, and social service system. Mean competency area ratings were computed for each subgroup, and then translated into rankings. Finally, these rankings were compared to the rankings of the total state agency and public provider respondent group. In Table 12, the competency areas are displayed from first to last as ranked by all state agency and public service provider respondents, with the corresponding competency area rankings of each of the state agency and public provider subgroups in the final three columns.

The rankings of the education and the social service system subgroups are most similar to those of the state agency and public service provider group as a whole. The most encouraging result of the subgroup comparison is how similar the employment system's rankings are to the social service system's rankings -- though the two systems have somewhat different missions. Less encouraging, however, is that both the employment and social service system agencies ranked computation seventh, two places lower than it was ranked by both state agency and public service providers as a whole and by education system agencies.

This low computation ranking is most inexplicable for the employment system subgroup. Computation usually receives its highest ranking from the private sector, and of all the state agency and public service providers, employment system agencies should have the greatest connection to the private sector.

Table 12 - Competency Area Rankings
by State Agency and Public Service Provider Subgroups

Competency Area	State Agency and Public Service Providers	Education System Agencies	Employment System Agencies	Social Service System Agencies
Basic Communication	**1**	2	2	1
Employment	**2**	3	1	2
Learning to Learn	**3**	1	3	4
Health	**4**	4	5	3
Computation	**5**	5	7	7
Community Resources	**6**	6	4	5
Consumer Economics	**7**	7	6	6
Government and Law	**8**	8	8	8

CASAS, 1997

A comparison between the business and industry provider rankings and the employment system agency rankings shows some discrepancy in the two groups' priorities (see Table 13). There is only a slight difference in the groups' first two rankings (basic communication first and employment second for business and industry providers, employment first and basic communication second for employment system agencies).There is, however, a full three place difference in the two groups' rankings for computation (fourth for business and industry providers, and seventh for employment system agencies) and community resources (seventh for business and industry providers, and fourth for employment system agencies).

The difference in rankings for community resources is easily explained: employment agencies need to prepare learners to access the community resources available to help the learners find and maintain employment. The difference in rankings for computation is not easily explained; employment system agencies need to place more of an emphasis on computation if they are to meet the needs of the private sector -- a key constituent group of theirs.

Table 13 - Comparison of Competency Area Rankings:
Business and Industry Provider and Employment System Agency Respondents

Business and Industry Provider Rankings	Competency Area	Employment System Agency Rankings
1	Basic Communication	2
2	Employment	1
3	Learning to Learn	3
5	Health	5
4	Computation	7
6	Consumer Economics	6
7	Community Resources	4
8	Government and Law	8

CASAS, 1997

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ratings, rankings, and priorities gleaned from Connecticut's survey respondents suggest steps the state could take to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and better focus program planning, staff development, and program coordination.

Curriculum

Recommendation One: In general, Connecticut adult education programs should place more emphasis on the attainment of basic communication, employment, learning to learn, and health competencies, and less on the attainment of computation, consumer economics, community resources, and government and law competencies.

Recommendation Two: Adult education programs with an employment emphasis should add computation to their list of high priority competency skill areas they need to help their students attain.

Recommendation Three: Adult education programs with a life skills focus should add consumer economics to their list of high priority competency skill areas they need to help their students attain. Life-skills focused programs might also place more emphasis on the attainment of health competencies, and less on the attainment of computation competencies. Computation competencies, however, should never be ignored, as long as employment remains a component of students' interests.

Recommendation Four: Connecticut adult education programs should use the top, high, mid, and low priority competencies selected by the aggregate, and when relevant, by the business and industry and/or learner respondent groups, to establish more detailed priorities within the various adult education curricula. Programs should focus first on helping learners acquire top priority skills, then high, then mid, and finally low.

Recommendation Five: Instructional staff, as well as state agency and public service provider personnel, should be involved in the development of curricula based on the results of this study. Targeting Education provides the necessary information to develop a common strategy for curriculum development or revision. Instructors will need to become familiar with survey findings, through individual review of this report and discussion with others, to clarify interpretation of the data.

Instruction

Recommendation Six: Connecticut adult education programs should use the learner preferences for each program to further target instruction within the curricula outlined above. ABE and secondary completion programs should put more of an emphasis on helping students acquire health, employment, learning to learn, and computation competencies, while ESL programs should put more of an emphasis on helping students acquire basic communication, consumer economics, and community resources competencies.

Recommendation Seven: Connecticut adult education programs should use the discrete micro-competency statements contained in the CASAS Competency List to expand on the competency statements selected for each curriculum, and develop a detailed instructional plan.

Recommendation Eight: Adult education program instructors should assess the skills of all learners to determine each learner's specific needs for acquiring specific competency statement skills. Instructors should then use this information to focus lessons at appropriate levels of ability. The CASAS Curriculum Materials Guide crosswalks CASAS competencies to available curriculum materials, and can help instructors prepare appropriate instructional plans.

Assessment

Recommendation Nine: Connecticut should select and use the assessment instruments most appropriate for any given program. Assessments for employment-focused curricula should emphasize the higher ranked competency areas and the top and high priority competency statements identified by business and industry providers. Assessments for life skills-focused curricula should emphasize the higher ranked competency areas and the top and high priority competency statements identified by learners.

Program Planning

Recommendation Ten: Local programs should use the results of this study to supplement information from their own community's demographics and needs assessments. Together, these provide a focus for program planning, specifically to

- Create a curriculum continuum;
- Articulate learner competency attainment;
- Determine certification benchmarks, and
- Identify curriculum priorities across levels and programs.

Staff Development

Recommendation Eleven: The findings from Targeting Education, particularly the different ratings, rankings, and priorities of the different constituent groups, should be shared widely among all instructors and state agency and public service provider personnel. Instructors need to have a clear understanding of both business and industry and learner expectations. They also must be prepared to help learners hoping to acquire new and/or better jobs understand what skills business and industry expects them to have. State agencies and public service providers also need to understand the perspectives of both business and industry and learners, so that they establish the appropriate tone, and communicate appropriate messages to those who do deliver educational services.

Recommendation Twelve: Instructional staff should receive training to properly use any new curricula, instructional materials, or assessments that are developed. Changes in curricula, instructional materials, and assessments cannot be effectively implemented without concurrent staff development.

Program Coordination

Recommendation Thirteen: The results of Targeting Education should be used to continue building an integrated delivery system for all adult learners in Connecticut, and to promote coordination across agencies. Programs will benefit from shared objectives, curricula, statewide assessments, and articulation among programs.

CONCLUSION

Adult education is key to Connecticut's future. It enables Connecticut residents to earn a good living, ensures that Connecticut businesses can grow and thrive, and promotes the well-being of Connecticut society as a whole. Connecticut's adult education and training programs can contribute to this future by providing learners with the skills sought by Connecticut's adult education stakeholders.

Targeting Instruction provides a wealth of information policy makers, program operators, and instructional personnel working in Connecticut's Education, Labor, and Social Services Departments can use to better target their programs and services to meet the needs of the state's residents. It can serve as a base for designing adult education curriculum, instruction, and assessments, for guiding program planning and staff development, and for promoting program coordination.